

COMPLICITY

HOW THE NORTH

PROMOTED, PROLONGED, and PROFITED

FROM SLAVERY

Anne Farrow, Joel Lang, and Jennifer Frank

of

THE HARTFORD COURANT

with

Cheryl Magazine, IMAGES EDITOR

Foreword by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham



BALLANTINE BOOKS • NEW YORK

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Published in the United States by Ballantine Books,
an imprint of The Random House Publishing Group,
a division of Random House, Inc., New York.

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ISBN 0-345-46782-5

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

www.ballantinebooks.com

2 4 6 8 9 7 5 3 1

First Edition

Book design by Susan Turner

A CONNECTICUT SLAVE

Three

SCREAMS AND CURSES POURED FROM THE OLD HOUSE ACROSS THE farmyard. The young black man, working in the barn, recognized the sobbing shrieks as his wife's and the torrent of abuse as coming from their mistress. He flew across the yard into the house. In the low-ceilinged kitchen before a great hearth, he tried to shield Meg from Elizabeth Stanton's fists.

As the man begged his wife to apologize, Elizabeth Stanton turned her fury on him, seizing her horsewhip.

"I reached out my great black hand, raised it up and received the blows of the whip on it which were designed for my head," Venture Smith recalled many years later in his life story. He yanked the leather whip from the furious woman and hurled it into the fire.

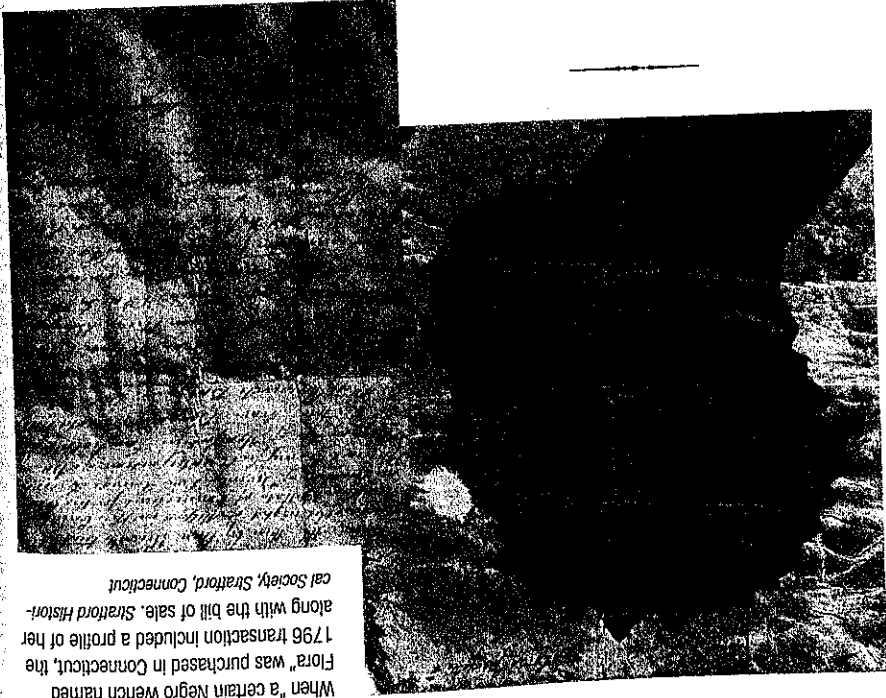
By the 1750s, when Meg and Venture Smith were fighting with their owner's wife, New England and the other Northern colonies were already becoming wealthy feeding slaves on the sugar plantations that covered the islands of the West Indies. The trade system that swept those Africans into permanent bondage also carried thousands of other Africans into forced labor in the American colonies.

In the collection of the Stratford, Connecticut, historical society is a paper silhouette of a nineteen-year-old woman named Flora. The silhouette, showing Flora's spiky hair and blunt young profile, was drawn in 1796 when Margaret Dwight of Milford sold her to Asa Benjamin—and "his Heirs & Assigns forever"—for about \$150 in today's currency. It is tempting to see Flora's silhouette as a metaphor for Northern slav-

Venture Smith was captured in Africa, shipped to Rhode Island, and bought, beaten, and sold in colonial Connecticut, where there were 5,000 others like him.



When "a certain Negro Wench named Flora" was purchased in Connecticut, the 1796 transaction included a profile of her along with the bill of sale. *Stafford Historical Society, Stafford, Connecticut*



ery: the thousands of enslaved people who lived in the North remain in the shadows.

In the years before the signing of the Declaration of Independence, there were tens of thousands of people in bondage in the Northern United States. Although precise figures are impossible to obtain, in 1760 there were at least 41,000 Africans enslaved in the North. This includes New England and the Middle Atlantic States of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware.

After the American Revolution, the numbers of slaves in the North dropped. George Washington had freed many Africans who fought for America because the British had promised freedom to blacks who joined the Loyalist cause. But in the 1790s, when Flora was sold to Asa Benjamin, Connecticut and Rhode Island together still had more than 6,000 people in bondage; Pennsylvania had 3,700; and New York had more than 20,000.

Despite these numbers, it didn't take long for an idealized notion of slavery to take root in the North. It soon became accepted as fact that Northern slavery was benign, loosely defined, more like a mutually agreed-upon indenture. Two centuries of human bondage was recast as a paternalistic, "family-style" arrangement, as beneficial to the slave as to the owner.

Missing from this rosy view was, among other things, the fact that owners had, in effect, the power of life and death over their "property." In Connecticut, for example, the colony's public records first mention a slave in 1639, reporting that a Hartford man had killed African Louis Berbice. Yet historian Bernard Steiner could write late in the nineteenth century that "Connecticut had little to apologize for in her treatment of the Negro," a statement most Northern citizens would have echoed comfortably. But the actual experience of slaves was often closer to that of Cato, Newport, and Adam. In 1758, Jonathan Trumbull, the future governor of Connecticut, sentenced the three "to be publicly whipped on the naked body for nightwalking after nine in the evening without an order from their masters."

Or that of the New York husband and wife sold by their master in 1765 for having too many children.

Or that of the eleven-year-old boy put up for sale in New London County, Connecticut, in 1760 by the family of Benedict Arnold, the nation's most infamous traitor. The advertisement for the child's sale said he was accustomed to work.

A respected study of the lives of slaves in coastal Narragansett, Rhode Island, where Venture Smith lived as a child, found that captives were routinely subjected to denigration, harsh corporal punishment, and the fear tactics inherent in a system of oppression.

Slaves in the North, like those in the South, served at the whim of their owners and could be sold or traded. They were housed in unheated attics and basements, in outbuildings and barns. They often slept on the floor, wrapped in coarse blankets. They lived under a harsh system of "black codes" that controlled their movements, prohibited their education, and limited their social contacts. Laws governing the rights and behaviors of slaves varied slightly from colony to colony, but they were updated in reaction to each new real or perceived threat. The two defining assumptions of all the codes were that blacks were dangerous in groups and that they were, at a basic human level, inferior.

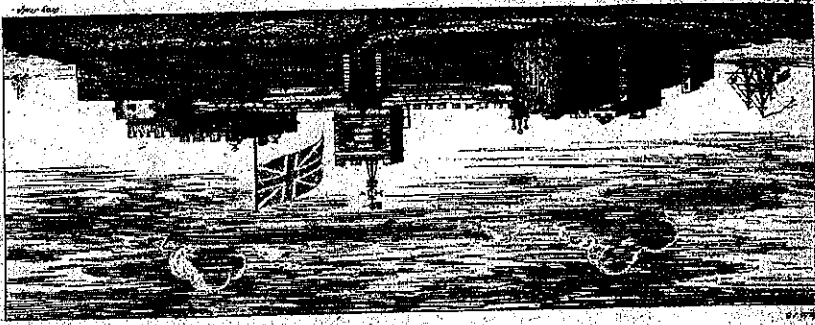
VENTURE SMITH PROVIDED A WINDOW INTO NORTHERN SLAVERY WITH his life story, which he dictated to Elisha Niles, a schoolteacher and Revolutionary War soldier. Published in New London, Connecticut, in 1798, it's one of only a handful of surviving black narratives encompassing life in Africa and colonial enslavement. The 31-page document is harrowing. Venture was raised as Brotoer Furro in the west of Africa, the first son of a rich and indulgent father. Two centuries of the slave trade had

Wretches, the Slaves, who are chained and confined there till a Demand comes. They are all marked with a burning Iron upon the right Breast." Atkins went on to remark upon the castle's "pleasant Prospect to the Sea," which allowed traders to watch for arriving ships sailing down the coast.

Venture was about to fall into the hands of a Rhode Island family whose name figures prominently in eighteenth-century New England. The Mumfords were quintessential Triangle Trade entrepreneurs: they commanded slave trade ships, owned farms where enslaved blacks worked, and sold captives in the West Indies and American colonies. On Africa's Gold Coast, about 40 miles from where Brocton was imprisoned, there was a city called Mumford.

Venture remembered being seated in a canoe and rowed out to a vessel bound for Barbados. Once on board, he was purchased by Robertson Mumford, the ship's steward, for a piece of calico cloth and four gallons of rum. He was named "Venture," because he was Mumford's private investment, and in that moment, he lost his name, his country, and his freedom.

The Middle Passage, the sea voyage from Africa into enslavement, ended Venture's childhood. The mortality rate among the captives, pinned cheek by jowl with the dead and dying, could be 15 to 20 percent at that time. On Venture's voyage the rate was even higher: of the 260 taken aboard in Africa, 60 died in an outbreak of smallpox.



The North-West Prospect of Cape Coast Castle.

Cape Coast Castle, a slave-trading compound not far from where Venture and his family were held, was described as "the largest, strongest & most beautiful castle" belonging to the Royal African Company. The Mariners' Museum, Newport News, Virginia

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made that part of Africa a battleground, with thousands kidnapped and sold into slavery every year. Black armies had been plundering communities on the continent's rich west coast since the sixteenth century, when Africans were first stolen to provide labor in the New World. Lin- ing the coast were about 40 "slave castles," or "slave factories," that

were, in effect, warehouses, established largely by Europeans, where traders from Europe and the colonies could se-

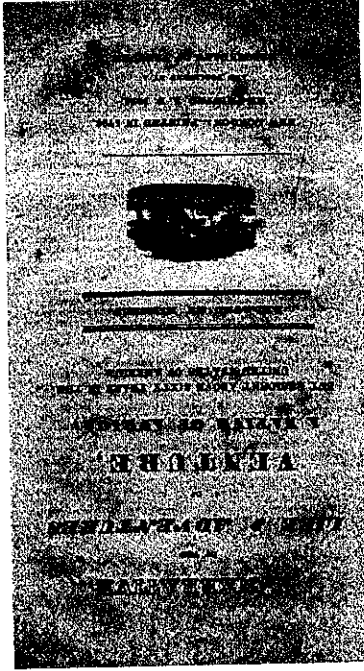
lect and buy captive human beings.

Believed to have been born about 1729, Venture was about eight when he and his family were captured and forced-marched to the coast of present-day Ghana. Though his father, Saungm Furro, had initially offered protection from the marauding army to a neighboring tribe, he and his community were quickly overrun as they tried to escape the slave-gathering dragnet.

"The very first salute I had from [the soldiers] was a violent blow on the head with the fore part of a gun, and at the same time a grasp round the neck," Venture said. "I then had a rope put about my neck, as had all the women in the thicker with me, and were immedi-

ately led to my father." The soldiers wanted Saungm Furro's money, "but he gave them no account of it," his son said. So, his family watching, they tortured Saungm Furro until he died. "The shocking scene is to this day fresh in my mind, and I have often been overcome while thinking on it." The old chief was spared seeing his wives and children dragged hundreds of miles to a coastal factory, where Brocton

John Atkins, a British surgeon aboard a slave trade ship in the decade before Brocton was taken, described the captives at Cape Coast Castle, an infamous slave fortress 15 miles from where Brocton and his family were held: "In the Area of this Quadrangle, are large Vaults, with an iron Grate at the Surface to let in Light and Air on those poor



Venture Smith dictated his life's story to a Revolutionary War soldier, and his account, originally published in 1798, is one of the few surviving narratives to encompass life in Africa, enslavement in colonial America, and freedom. Title page to A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, 1835 ed., The Connecticut Historical Society Museum, Hartford, Connecticut

Most of the survivors were sold in Barbados. Only Venture and Mumfords' dairy and stock farms in the Narragansett region. Within a year or two, Venture was moved to New York, to live with another branch of the family on Fishers Island in Long Island Sound. He spent his days carding wool and performing other household tasks. Then, because he was big and strong, he was set to work pounding corn for animal feed. He regularly labored far into the night, and was punished if his work was not done well. But the hardest part was the abuse by his master's son.

"[James] would order me to do this and that business different from what my master directed me," Venture recalled. One day, when Venture refused to set aside his assigned tasks, James tried to beat him with a pitchfork. Venture fought back and sent James crying to his mother.

Venture may have been more than James's equal physically, but he was also a slave, and in colonial America in the late 1730s, he was nobody's equal. Venture allowed himself to be bound and carried to James for punishment. "He took me to a gallows made for the purpose of hanging cattle on, and suspended me on it," said Venture. Probably slung up by a rope bound around his wrists, the boy hung there for an hour.

VENTURE'S STORY AND THE ACCOUNTS OF OTHER ENSLAVED BLACK Northerners share a leitmotif of abuse. Beatings and the threat of beatings were constant. Children were whipped and saw their parents and siblings whipped.

One of the most famous freedom fighters of the nineteenth century was born a slave in 1797 in Ulster County, New York. The property of Colonel Johannes Hardenburgh and later of his son, Charles Hardenburgh, she was christened Isabella, but history knows her by the name she gave herself, Sojourner Truth. She left a record of her nearly 30 years in captivity.

She and her family lived in the dark cellar of the Hardenburghs' house. After Charles Hardenburgh's death, a neighbor bought her, and some sheep, for \$100. She was nine years old.

"They gave her plenty to eat," she recalled in her third-person narrative, "and also plenty of whippings." One Sunday morning, Sojourner's owner beat the child severely, until blood streamed from her wounds. "And now," she says, "when I hear 'em tell of whipping women on the bare flesh, it makes my flesh crawl, and my very hair rise on my head! Oh! My God!"



Freedom fighter Sojourner Truth was sold, beaten, and abused in New York, and she saw her parents die of hunger and cold there. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division (LC-USZ62-119343)

Killing a slave at the time of Sojourner Truth's severe beating was taken more seriously than when Venture Smith was young in the mid-1700s. In Venture's youth, the black codes almost demanded harsh punishment, and it was not considered a capital crime to kill an enslaved man, woman, or child in the course of "correcting" him or her. Corporal punishment was advocated as necessary for the "good regulating and ordering" of slaves. The assumption was that an owner would never deliberately destroy his own property. Since a whip or a cane was not necessarily a lethal weapon, it was difficult to prove that a master, in his rage, had intended to kill a disobedient slave. Joshua Hempstead, whose diary documents a half century of life in eighteenth-century New London, wrote of the time in 1751 when a husband and wife were questioned about the beating death of their slave girl: "In the afternoon I was at Capt Danil Coits to hear the Examination of Mr. Nicholas Letchmere & his wife upon account of the sudden Death of their Servt Zeno a female about 6 or 7 year old who Died a Sund night about 2 in ye morning." The child's body was examined, and her death was attributed to the severity of the beating. Hempstead's last reference to Zeno's fatal punishment was that there was a well-attended public hearing into the incident, and that the child was buried.

VENTURE LIVED WITH HIS OWNERS IN A FRAGILE TRUCE THAT WAS frequently interrupted by open warfare. As he matured, he grew into the kind of captive who pushed back—though slavery scholars agree that most captives resisted in some way. Passive resistance included doing work slowly or poorly, breaking or stealing tools and objects from the household, pretending not to understand instructions, truancy, and a kind of mild noncompliance that tested an owner's will. More overt

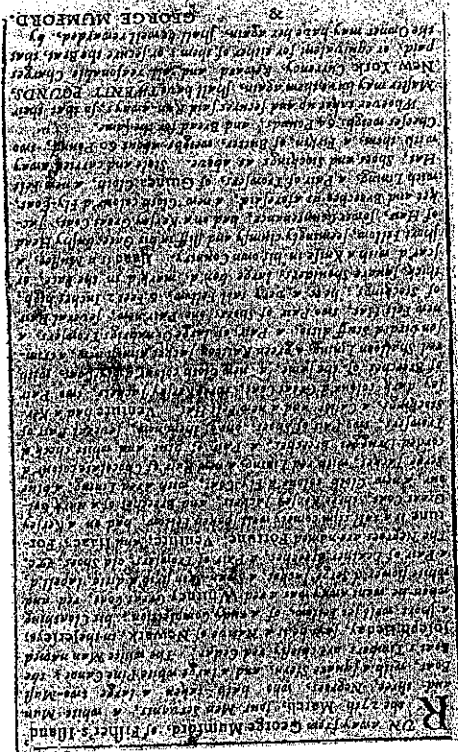
forms of resistance included fighting back when beaten or abused, appealing to the legal system for justice, and running away. The more active the captive's resistance, the more punishment and dislocation he or she tended to suffer.

Despite its risks and poor odds for success, running away was one of the clearest statements a captive could make, and it baffled most slave owners, who believed blacks, as inferior and passive, were naturally suited to slavery.

Venture was in his early twenties when he ran away from the Mumfords' Fishers Island property with two other enslaved black men and a white indentured servant named Joseph Heday, who had devised the plan. Detailed information about their getaway survives in Venture's narrative: "We privately collected out of our master's store, six great old cheeses, two firkins of butter, and one whole batch of new bread. When we had gath-

ered all our own clothes and some more, we took them all about midnight, and went to the water side. We stole our master's boat, embarked, and then directed our course for the Mississippi river." (In his later life in freedom, Venture became a skilled mariner, but his seaman-ship at this time was murky.)

In an April 1754 advertisement in the weekly *New-York Gazette* seeking the return of his runaways, George Mumford offered the modern-day equivalent of about \$1,000, an unusually large reward, for the return of the men or his two-masted boat and white pine canoe. The ad also gives scholars the only existing description of Venture. He is described as "a very tall fellow, 6 feet 2 inches high, thick square shoulders, large bon'd, mark'd in the face, or scar'd with a knife in his own country."



The most accurate description of Venture Smith survives in an advertisement placed by his owner when Venture, two other slaves, and a white indentured servant tied their captivity in 1754. Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations



Some of the most dramatic moments described in Venture Smith's narrative—such as his grabbing the whip from his owner's wife and throwing it into the kitchen fire—occurred in this house, which still stands. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS, CONN, 6-STONII, 4-2)

The men got as far as the eastern end of Long Island. Though the four had promised to stick together, Heday stole everyone's gear from the boat while Venture was looking for water, and the other two slaves, Fortune and Isaac, were cooking. The three blacks pursued Heday and caught up with him a few miles away, but Venture, hoping to minimize the damage to his eventual chances for freedom, decided they should return and confess.

The white man was punished for his role as ringleader. Venture's punishment was to be sold, the price rebellious slaves often paid. Purchased by Thomas Stanton of Stonington, Connecticut, Venture had to leave behind Meg and their month-old daughter, Hannah. About a year and a half later, probably sometime in 1758, Stanton bought Venture's family, too. The house, where Meg and her mistress fought, still stands. Meg and Venture may have lived in the attic. The stairs leading to it rise a few steps, then turn sharply to the attic's main floor, with its steeply pitched roof and small windows. On the first step, just where Venture and Meg would have turned for the sharp climb, a smooth hollow has been worn into the stair.

The wide door at the front of the house overlooks fields of tall grass, and at the back of the gray-shingled house is a small, weathered doorway to the kitchen. Family descendants who own the property still call it "the slave door."

slavery's rules, and in getting physically violent with the Stantons he had crossed every boundary except the last one: murdering his owner. Incidents of slaves' trying to kill their owners jump from colonial records. As early as 1708, a New York couple and their three children were murdered by the family's two slaves. In New Jersey, a slave struck off his owner's head with an axe, and in Newport, Rhode Island, a black man murdered the white woman who had beaten him. Connecticut's colonial diarist Joshua Hempstead wrote of the New London slave who shipped ratsbane into the family "coffy." Other poisonings or attempts to poison owners appear frequently in records.

IF THE FIRST HALF OF VENTURE'S LIFE DEMONSTRATES THE PHYSICAL and psychological violence that was a consistent feature in slavery's landscape, the next period, his final years as a captive, offers the even broader lesson of how indispensable slavery was for the North. Southern captives were overwhelmingly agricultural workers, usually laboring in groups. But the North had a different ecosystem and a different style of slavery, and captives had to adapt to the diverse requirements of their owner's household, or farm, or other business. Slaves in the North worked in agriculture and in the maritime trades, but they also had tasks as varied as operating printing presses, shoeing horses, and constructing houses and barns.

Hempstead's longtime slave, Adam, who worked on his land in New London and Stonington for 40 years, labored all day, every day. Hempstead mentions Adam's threshing hay and wheat, tending livestock, building and repairing stone walls, cutting wood, harvesting apples and other crops, fixing broken wagons and farm equipment, and caring loads of seaweed.

Newspaper advertisements for runaway slaves are a testament to the variety and skill level of their work, and they indicate, further, how valuable the slaves were to their owners. Eighteenth-century ads for runaways in New York and New Jersey, for example, contain descriptive phrases such as "shipwright by trade," "a carpenter and a cooper by trade," "understands all sorts of Husbandry Work, and something of the Trade of a Black-Smith," "a very good cooper, speaks English, French and Dutch and can read and write," "can bleed and draw Teeth, Pretending to be a great doctor," "a Chimney-sweeper," and "a very good shoemaker." These were just a few of the many trades and professions mentioned. Enslaved black women in the North were maids and household ser-

Thomas Stanton was a short man, and Venture's strength was already legendary. While a captive on Fishers Island, he had won a dare by carrying a 42-gallon barrel filled with salt nearly 50 feet. But the balance of power in this master/slave relationship rested with Stanton, who had been hunting on Long Island when Venture grabbed the whip from Elizabeth Stanton and threw it into the fire. This kind of resistance, a direct threat to the authority of the slaveholder, could not go unpunished. Stanton waited a few days before responding, and then had surprise on his side.

"In the morning as I was putting a log in the fire-place, not suspecting harm from any one, I received a most violent stroke on the crown of my head with a club two feet long and as large round as a chair-post," Venture recalled. "The first blow made me have my wits about me you may suppose, for as soon as he went to renew it, I snatched the club out of his hands."

As he continued to resist, Venture made life harder for himself. Yet he refused to give in. Carrying the bloody club, Venture went to a neighboring justice of the peace to complain about his treatment. Furious, Thomas Stanton and his brother, Robert, jumped on horses and cracked the slave to the justice's home, only to receive a humiliating rebuke for their cruelty. But the justice counseled Venture to be patient and await another incident of abuse before complaining again.

The mood on the trip home was frosty, until the three came to a secluded place and the two white men dismounted and began beating Venture. His reaction, predictably, was rage. He threw both men to the ground and, he said, "laid one of them across the other, and stamped both with my feet what I would." The two managed to get control over him and hauled him to a blacksmith, who put him in handcuffs. When Elizabeth Stanton gloated over his constraints, Venture thanked her mercily, and for his insolence was draped in heavy chains. Robert Stanton had borrowed money from Venture that the slave had earned doing extra jobs. Robert did not intend to repay the loan, which may have been part of the reason he advised his brother to sell the slave. After several days of silent treatment for Venture from the Stantons, Hempsstead Miner, another Stonington resident, offered to buy him. (Miner secretly counseled him to appear especially truculent and miserable, which drove down the purchase price.) So, at the age of thirty, for the third time in his life, Venture was sold, and for a price that reflected the fact that the Stantons just wanted to be rid of him. Despite the high quality of his work, Venture was breaking all of

nothing he could live without, sleeping on a cold hearth with one blanket over him and one under. A quarter of his earnings went to his owner. A man saving to buy his freedom was subject to various forms of deceit. The owner could set a price, then change his mind once the agreed-upon sum was saved. Or he could take the money and refuse to free the slave. Even for Venture, who had the physical and mental stamina to resist the soul-crushing effects of American slavery, the system was filled with uncertainty and fraught with risks.

After several years, Venture went to Oliver Smith with close to the hundreds of acres for that amount—but the colonel had said he wanted to have enough money to cover Venture's care in case his health broke down. Increasingly, towns were turning to former owners for help in supporting freed slaves who became indigent.

Sojourner Truth of New York describes the broken health of her enslaved parents, and their owner's decision to free them both so that her mother could take care of her blind, lame father. But her mother did not live long, and her father died of hunger and cold in a filthy shed. "What a compensation for a life of toil, of patient submission to repeated robberies of the most aggravated kind, and, also, far more than murderous neglect," their daughter wrote bitterly.

"Being thirty-six years old, I left Col. Smith once for all," Venture said, "I had already been sold three times, made considerable money with seemingly nothing to derive [from it], . . . lost much by misfortunes, and paid an enormous sum for my freedom." He called himself Venture Smith. Years later, he said, "My freedom is a privilege nothing else can equal."

ASSEMBLING HIS FAMILY IN FREEDOM TOOK 10 MORE YEARS AND THE modern-day equivalent of \$1,500 dollars. Venture first bought his sons Solomon and Cuff, Hannah's younger brothers, so they would help him earn the money to buy their mother and sister. To his father's grief, Solomon went to sea at seventeen with a Rhode Island man to learn whaling and died of scurvy on his first voyage. Cuff, who later fought on the side of the colonists in the American Revolution, worked with his father on Long Island, farming, chopping wood, fishing for eels and lobsters, and making a homestead. They owned a 30-ton sloop and used it to ferry wood to Rhode Island; this was one of Venture's most lucrative endeavors. Venture eventually owned several dwellings and boats, and had sub-

vants. They were spinners, weavers, cooks, and cleaners. They grew food, hauled wood and water, watched the children, tended the sick, made medicines, and helped with the family business. They were seamstresses, soap makers, dyers, and laundresses.

John Adams, one of the few Founding Fathers who refused to own black people, said he paid handsomely for his principles because captive labor (in New England) was widespread, very skilled, and cheap.

Venture Smith had the diverse skills of many Northern captives. His work experiences included farming, fishing, logging, woodworking, and shipping. Like any mid-eighteenth-century countryman, he could fell a tree, build a house, and roast a raccoon. He was also, at one point during his enslavement, a household servant. He was the kind of slave described in sales advertisements as "fit for town or country work."

Hempstead Miner, Venture's new owner, removed the slave's chains and said he would not oppose Venture's saving for his eventual freedom. But there was a snag. Miner, who later ended up in debtor's prison, may never have intended to keep Venture for his own service, and he immediately took him from coastal Stonington up to Hartford and pawned him for £10 to a lawyer named Daniel Edwards. The black man became Edwards's house servant, his "cupbearer" and waiter.

The Hartford man liked and trusted Venture, and asked him why Miner had wished to part with him. The black man answered with a candor that shows how well he understood his position in chattel bondage: "I replied that I could not give him the reason, unless it was to convert me into cash, and speculate with me as with other commodities." Edwards must have been moved by the reply, because he gave Venture a horse to return to Stonington to see his wife and children at Thomas Stanton's farm. (Venture notes wryly, "My old master appeared much ruffled at my being there.")

Miner worked out an arrangement whereby Colonel Oliver Smith, also of Stonington, would assume ownership of Venture, by then thirty-one. Smith owned a new, handsome, gambrel-roofed house in Stonington Borough, a waterfront pocket settled by merchants, shipowners, and sea captains. Smith, a big, good-looking man, was a shipbuilder and a personal friend of George Washington's. He was involved in trade with the West Indies and owned several slaves besides Venture. He was also receptive to Venture's plan to earn the money for his freedom, a goal Venture pursued aggressively, although it took him nearly a half-dozen years to achieve.

Venture worked on Fishers Island and on tiny Ram Island, cutting wood, threshing grain, and performing other agricultural tasks. He bought

In Africa, Venture wrote, such a proceeding "would have been branded as a crime equal to highway robbery. But Captain Hart was a white gentleman and I a poor African, therefore it was all right, and good enough for the black dog."

Venture died in 1805. He was in his midseventies, almost blind, his huge body broken by hard work. He and Meg are buried in the cemetery next to a tall white church in East Haddam, Connecticut, near soldiers of the American Revolution and local merchants and landowners. His headstone is made of a reddish-brown stone quarried locally, and carved with an angel.

The inscription reads: "Sacred to the Memory of Venture Smith, African. Tho the son of a King he was kidnapped and sold as a slave but by his industry he acquired Money to Purchase his Freedom."

In the last few sentences of his narrative, Venture took his own measure. Chief among his consolations he cited Meg, "the wife of my youth, whom I married for love and bought with my money," and his freedom. He outlived the three men who owned him, but not slavery itself. By the Civil War, more than a half century after Venture died, America's enslaved population was close to 4 million, more than five times what it had been when he was a slave.

The record Venture Smith left of his singular life shows the burden of suffering that all slaves bore. When he was carried to his grave by his pallbearers, two white men and two enslaved black men, they complained of his weight.

"My temporal affairs were in a pretty prosperous condition," he said. He was in his midforties when he and Meg had another son, whom they named Solomon, after their lost child. In 1776, they left their Long Island village and moved to Haddam Neck on the Connecticut River, establishing a homestead on 100 riverfront acres. Venture made enough money farming, fishing, and shipping wood to buy several other black men, expecting that they would repay their purchase price and then begin their own lives in freedom.

And although he prospered, the injustice that dominated the first half of his life was never far from his experience. In 1780, a hogshhead of



Venture Smith is buried in the cemetery of a Congregational church not far from where he lived and prospered after becoming a free man. Joanne HoYoung Lee, The Hartford Courant

molasses that was being shipped to a wealthy merchant on one of Venture's boats was lost overboard. Though not on board at the time of the loss, Venture was held liable and advised to settle up, since the rich man planned to sue until he recovered the price of the molasses. Venture paid the \$10 to the merchant, Elisha Hart, who later taunted him repeatedly over the mishap.

